

Social Square Dancing

Calvin Campbell

Social Square Dancing is a new program designed for square dancers who do not want to spend time to attend 25 or 30 lessons or more to dance with their peers. The number of “basics” they will be taught will 50 “basics” from the Basic and Mainstream list. The length of lessons will be about 12-15. This complexity of material presented will be largely Standard Applications and a few examples of Extended Application. For addition details please consult The SSD Teaching Guide and Standard Application Document available from CALLERLAB.

I view the plan as a breath of fresh air to Modern Western Square Dancing. A way to attract a new population of dancers. A way to get away from the present culture of puzzle solving square dancing. A way for dancers to have a choice on what and how they dance.

All of modern western square dancing is in a time crunch. We can’t recruit enough new dancers to replace the dancers who are leaving the recreation. When we do recruit them, we don’t spend enough time training them properly. We need a shorter list of “basics” to teach and we need some place for these dancers to dance. Social Square Dancing will hopefully provide that place.

Social Square Dancing will provide an environment where dancers can have “FUN” and can decide whether they want to try “PLUS” or some of the other dance programs. Since there are only 15 lessons’ it provides a way to have more classes per year. Several areas in the U.S. have successfully tried the program (under the name Sustainable Square Dancing) and it works

It takes skilled square dance callers to make it work. Some callers worry about providing variety. Any caller who has 30 years or more of experience has the variety. The SSD Teaching Guide is another source. CALLERLAB has many documents that can provide examples. I went through my book (All About Modules) and I only had to eliminate about 25% of the Modules to meet their list and I still had over 800 Modules.

Variety really has nothing to do with the terminology. It has to do with the dances that can be created using that terminology. There are thousands and thousands of dances that can be created with the calls on the SSD list. When dancers finished a tip, they don’t remember the terminology the caller used. They only remember whether the dance was fun and if they were successful in doing the dance.

SSD will also not be focused on keeping the dancers on-their-toes. The type of dance they will want to dance will be the kind that keeps the wind in their faces. This will mean the callers will have to learn timing and smoothness. Success will be the joy of constant movement.

Singing calls will probably need to be limited to one OBC and one or two figures. SSD dancers will want to turn off their brains and enjoy the music. Callers will be able to really match the call to the lyrics.

I foresee the return of the walk-thru. If the caller wants to do a figure that might cause problems. Walk it before you dance it. The dancers will welcome the practice. It is the success of the dancers you are after and not the average skill of any audience.

For callers, it will be a fun time. You may have to learn some new skills, but each of these skills can be carried forward. You will be calling to dancers that do not expect you to know hundreds of “basics” to the last detail. Since “cvsStandard Applications of the “Basics” will

be the norm you will have to be creative with how to make these “basics” into dances. In the process, you will learn a lot about square dance choreography.

One of the most important elements of the SSD program will be the ability to shorten the teaching time for beginner classes. 15 weeks of teaching time will mean up to three classes a year. It will allow slower learners to recycle back through the next class if they fall behind for some reason.

Teaching 50 “basic” in 15 weeks will still be hard. “Basics” introduced in the lessons will have to be refined after graduation, but most likely the audience at the clubs will welcome the review.

New dancers are the most enthused about getting their friends interested in square dancing about three weeks into lessons. In SSD, classes they will only be waiting about two months or less.

Lastly, SSD clubs will be more social. The format is tailored for promoting social glue. A lot of the success in this area will depend on the caller. Remember that the dancers are there to relax and have “fun”. They are not interested in being tested on their knowledge of square dance terminology. Just put the wind in their faces and let them dance.